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SUBJECT: TADIC: "WE ARE NOT GIVING UP ON KOSOVO"

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Serbian President Tadic warned Ambassador Khalilzad on January 16 that independence for Kosovo could turn Serbia against integration with Europe. Tadic said he is trying to reach a compromise with Kosovo Albanians on final status within a context of substantial autonomy and suggested that consideration of any other arrangement should be deferred until Serbia and Kosovo were safely integrated into the European Union. Ambassador Khalilzad agreed that EU integration is the ultimate answer to the Kosovo impasse, but explained that the accession process could not get fully underway with the Kosovo problem unresolved. He urged Tadic not to let Serbia react to Kosovo events with self-defeating actions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Khalilzad met with Serbian President Boris Tadic on January 16, hours before the Security Council considered the secretary-general's quarterly report on UNMIK (reported septel). Also participating in the meeting were Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremic and Serbian Ambassador to the UN Pavle Jevremovic as well as Deputy Political Counselor.

¶3. (SBU) President Tadic said Serbia had presented "a very clear model of substantial autonomy" during the Troika-sponsored final status talks. He called for further talks because "we are not giving up on Kosovo." He said he had met in New York with Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and would meet with him again in an effort to reach a final status compromise, but complained that recent Kosovo history and promises of independence had made Kosovo Albanians uncooperative. He allowed that "we have a very bad legacy from which I am trying to recover," but insisted that "I am not Slobodan Milosevic."

¶4. (SBU) To Ambassador Khalilzad's suggestion that the ultimate destiny for Serbia and Kosovo alike is a stable and prosperous union with Europe, President Tadic replied that the Serbian people "are too angry now over the idea of losing Kosovo. Their reaction is to distance us from Europe, asking 'why do we need to be in Europe when some EU countries support independence for Kosovo.'" He proposed that the international community take up the Kosovo status issue only after Serbia is fully integrated into the EU, adding that "it will be very hard to keep Serbia on an integration track if Kosovo is independent."

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador Khalilzad urged Tadic to change his perspective, to understand that "it would be a mistake for Serbs to react to Kosovo events by hurting yourselves again."

Khalilzad explained that the EU has made clear that the integration process could not be accelerated as the U.S. is urging if we don't deal with the Kosovo problem first." He closed by saying that Washington "holds you personally in high esteem and hopes that this disagreement will not stand as an enduring problem in our relations." Tadic noted that we disagree "for the first time in our history."

KHALILZAD